# The Origin and Function of Ceremonies in Judaism

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# THE ORIGIN AND FUNCTION OF CEREMONIES IN JUDAISM

By Dr. K. Kohler, Cincinnati, Ohio

The significance of ceremony in the religious life of the Jew forms one of the main points at issue between Orthodoxy and Reform. To Rabbinical Judaism the Sinaitic Law, written or oral, is immutable (compare with Maimonides' ninth article his Code H. Yesode ha Torah ix), each of the 613 commandments being regarded as fundamental (David ben Zimra Responsa i, 344). The distinction made between moral laws dictated by reason and ritual laws which rather baffle reason and common sense (Sifra Ahare Moth xiii; Yoma 67b) does not imply that the former are of greater importance, nor does the latter classification of the Mosaic laws into rational or social and divinely revealed ones (Saadia Emunoth iii. 1-2, Ibn Ezra to Exod. xxi. 2 and Kuzari II/48; iii. 7, 11) place the former class higher than the latter. "The divine precepts, whether their purposes are intelligible to us or not, demand unreserved obedience" says Maimonides (Moreh iii. 26, with reference to Yoma 67b, Sanhedrin 21b, Bereshith Rabba 44, comp. Berakot 33b). Nay more. While dividing the Mosaic laws into universally human or social and specifically Jewish or religious precepts, Maimonides expressly assigns to the latter a higher rank in view of their ulterior spiritual aims and purposes. (Moreh iii. 27 and Mishnah Commentary Peah. i. 1). Nor do Simeon Duran (Magen Aboth at the beginning) and Albo (Ikkarim iii. 25) take a different view when speaking of the ceremonial laws in contradistinction to the moral and social or juridical statutes, since for them also the former as the religious or divinely revealed ones claim a higher place as constituting the Jewish mode of worshiping God. Viewed in this light, Moses Mendelssohn was in perfect accord with tradition when, rationalist as he was, he declared the ceremonial laws to

be the essential portion of the Mosaic legislation, whereas the ethical laws of the Pentateuch, being dictates of reason and common-sense, are the universal property of mankind. "In order, then, to have a people of pure theists in the midst of a world of polytheists, the divine law-giver had to bind the members of the Jewish nation together by the observance of certain practices which were to serve as signs and symbols expressive of religious and ethical truths. Instead of imposed dogmatic beliefs which shackle the human intellect, these ceremonies should form a species of picture-language to awaken and foster certain thoughts in the minds of all and appeal to the heart of each so as to render them guardians of pure theism. These bonds, then, intended to keep Israel's people together for all time are forever to remain in force, whether their original purpose be still understood or not, until it would please the Most High to reveal His will anew in a legislation as solemn, as positive and as all-powerful as was the one on Sinai." This well-known view presented by Mendelssohn in his Jerusalem, says Zunz in his "Gutachten ueber die Beschneidung," 1844, prevailed for some time, and Zunz himself as well as Reggio, whom he quotes, shares it in so far as both lay all stress upon the ceremonial law as being peculiarly Jewish and bound up with the memories and hopes of the Jewish people. It is, however, a great inconsistency on the one hand to denounce submission to an imposed creed in the name of liberty of conscience and on the other hand to demand blind submission to imposed forms of practice which no longer have any meaning for us. It is perfectly logical for him who believes in a supernatural revelation to maintain that, no matter whether they appeal to our understanding or not, the ritual laws demand obedience as "the decrees of the great Ruler of Life concerning which scrutiny is not permissible." On the part of such as deny the authenticity of the Pentateuch—and here Zunz and Graetz are on the same side as the adherents of the Kuenen-Wellhausen school—blind adherence to usages that have no justification in themselves is, as Dr. Geiger, in his "Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift," 1830, so well characterized it: "Hunde-Gehorsam," slavish practice without conviction, unworthy of thinking men. The whole Reform movement, indeed, as is so lucidly shown by Dr. David Philipson in his scholarly work: "The

Reform Movement in Judaism" (see especially 6-13; 332 f.) hinges on the question whether Judaism is a system of ceremonial observance as binding upon the Jew as is the system of dogmatic belief upon the Christian, or whether Judaism is a system of religious and ethical truths, the ceremonies being only the means to higher ends, not ends in themselves.

It is not the object of this paper to follow up the warfare waged by the leaders of Reform against ceremonialism. It is fully recognized today that Holdheim far overshot the mark or, as Dr. Philipson aptly expressed it (p. 91 eodem) "he made the serious error of quite underestimating the place of ceremony in the religious life," when he declared the whole ceremonial law to be the outcome of Israel's national life and, therefore, of no validity for Judaism as a religion. Far more correct was the attitude of Einhorn and Samuel Hirsch at the very outset when, in opposing the vagaries of the Frankfort Reform Verein, they emphasized the need of ceremonies as symbolic expressions of the priest-mission assigned to the Jewish people (see "Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums," 1844, p. 88 f.; 123 f., 134 f. compare Aaron Chorin "Rabbinische Gutachten ueber die Vertraeglichkeit der freien Forschung" 1842, p. 28). But in how far the ceremonies are to be regarded as essentially Jewish and therefore to be unalterably maintained, and in how far they present only adaptations from older non-Jewish life and accordingly permit of modifications, alterations, and radical changes is a question concerning which opinions still widely differ. In order to reach positive conclusions, a historic review of the ceremonies in their various stages of growth is required, and the principles underlying their development in the different phases of religious life must be investigated and established.

## The Origin and Development of Jewish Ceremonies

When speaking of ceremony, we must dismiss the notion we moderns have that it is a mere conventional form without intrinsic value and meaning. To go back to the Latin, *caerimonia* signifies reverence and awe like the word *religio* with which it is frequently coupled, while the plural *caerimoniae* denotes religious rites, which

in Rome had a magical rather than a symbolical character. That is to say, the Roman ceremonies were believed to have a coercive power over the deities. For the pagan mind in general the ceremonies constitute religion, which is viewed simply as a mode of worship void of ethical purposes. In the course of time, however, the original object of these ceremonies is forgotten, and they become empty forms until upon a higher stage they are invested with new meaning and made to convey higher thoughts. There is, consequently, a singular affinity noticeable between the ceremonies of various people and classes, since, as a rule, they have a common origin in primitive life. Ceremonies are never the creations of individuals; they grow and change like languages. They are, as Edward B. Tylor in his "Primitive Culture" and his "Researches into Early History of Mankind" calls them, "the gesture-language of theology." The people that crave for rain, for instance, would in solemn manner pour out water before the heavenly power to suggest what it should do for them, and henceforth water libation becomes part of the sacrificial ritual elsewhere. Each ceremony may thus be traced to its origin in primitive time. When the Occidental lifts his hat before a superior today, he is unaware of the far older form of showing submissive self-surrender by stripping oneself of all armaments and equipments which, of course, included the headgear. This corresponds with the Oriental custom of taking off the shoes, as Tylor has shown. On the other hand, it is regarded as disrespectful in the East to receive, or be seen by, strangers bareheaded, and it stands to reason that it is considered by Orientals still more derogatory to the honor of God to stand bareheaded before Him in prayer or in sight of the sanctuary. (See Mishnah Barakot ix, 5, where the words: *"Lo yakel et rosho beshaar ha Mizrah"* can only mean "One should not bare his head in sight of the Holy of Holies," exactly as the Roman priests officiated only with covered heads. Compare Hughes Dictionary of Islam, s. v. Head; and Jewish Encyclopedia s. v. Bareheadedness). You observe at once the pivotal question at issue: Are we as Jews in Occidental life to be Orientals in the house of God, or are we Occidentals in every respect?

So are forms of greeting mere questions of politeness to us. But when the Mishnah in Berakot, just quoted, dwells at some length upon an ancient Pharisaic institution to the effect that, contrary to the rule prohibiting the use of the sacred name of God for profane purposes, men should distinctly pronounce the holy Name when meeting each other, as did men in Biblical times, we must come to the conclusion that this usage had a more serious motive. No doubt, the fear of malign influences such as that of the evil eye and the various evil omina prompted these greetings (comp. Psalms cxxix. 8; Ruth ii. 4) the real meaning of which gradually fell into oblivion.

Robertson Smith in the introductory remarks to his "Religion of the Semites" says: "Behind the positive religions which * * * trace their origin to the teaching of great religious innovators who spoke as the organs of a divine revelation, lies the body of religious usage and belief which cannot be traced to the influence of individual minds. No positive religion that has moved men has been able to start with a *tabula rasa*. A new scheme of faith can find a hearing only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist in its audience, and it cannot reach these without taking account of the traditional forms in which all religious feeling is embodied, and without speaking a language which men accustomed to these old forms can understand * * * The precepts of the Pentateuch did not create a priesthood and a sacrificial service on an altogether independent basis, but only reshaped and remodelled, in accordance with a more spiritual doctrine, institutions of an older type which in many particulars were common to the Hebrews with their heathen neighbors. Every one who reads the Old Testament with attention is struck with the fact that the origin and *rationale* of sacrifice are nowhere fully explained; that sacrifice is an essential part of religion is taken for granted as something which is not a doctrine peculiar to Israel but is universally admitted and acted on *without* as well as *within* the limits of the chosen people." These observations have their bearing upon the whole Mosaic Code with its purity and dietary laws. Of course, the orthodox Jew of the type of David Hoffman in Berlin for whom the Mosaic Code with

its traditional interpretation is divinely revealed and the sacrificial and Levitical laws only temporarily suspended until their reinstatement by a divinely ordained power, can only assign mystical, or at best symbolical, reasons to all the ceremonies prescribed by the Torah. We, who behold in religion an ever-progressive force working through the inner consciousness of man, first collectively and afterwards individually, must ascertain the origin and purpose of each and every ceremony in order to find out whether by appealing to our minds and hearts it fulfills a religious function or whether it has become an empty shell with the kernel gone. In doing so, we must discriminate between the ancient ceremonies of Biblical times which are still influenced by primitive notions, the Rabbinical ceremonies which received their mould and character under the influence of conscious but authoritative forces, and modern ceremonies which still lack more or less the authority of historic powers and specific Jewish characteristics.

### 1. The Mosaic Ceremonial

The Mosaic ceremonial system, impressive as it is with the authority of divine legislation and with the grandeur of a great world-wide historic power, speaks to us, nevertheless, in a religious language not our own. We have to retranslate it into our own mode of thinking and feeling. It is based upon sacrifice against which our religious consciousness revolts. It rests upon notions of priestly holiness and purity which we reject. It confines the worship of the Most High to the priesthood and the sanctuary and fails to bring God nigh to the people and home to each heaven-aspiring soul. Mosaism, with its temple cult, it to us—and this is the essential difference between Reform and Orthodox Judaism—only the preparatory stage to Rabbinism with its Synagogical life and to Modern Judaism with its many-centered religious life. Those who call us Karaites or Mosaites know neither what Karaism was nor what Reform Judaism stands for. We believe in the ever-working laws of historic evolution and see in assimilation the force ever at work in Judaism's progress. The entire *sacrificial* cult of the Pentateuch is the result of a powerful assimilation.

Careful scientific investigations comparing the Babylonian, the Phoenician and the old Arabic sacrificial system, including even the terminology, with that of the Mosaic Code, have established the fact beyond a cavil of doubt that the divine lawgiver, or lawgivers, simply adopted the rules and customs of priestly practice prevalent for ages, while at the same time eliminating such elements as were connected with idolatry, witchcraft and the abominable orgies of the Astart and Baal cult, and changing form and character here and there to give the whole service a higher and more spiritual meaning and purpose. The fundamental principle that all the sacrificial and priestly practices should, by various degrees of purity and sanctity, lead up to and culminate in the divine ideal of Holiness, in a Holy God whose sacredness is to eradiate from the sanctuary and impart itself to the people over the land, at once lent the system a peculiar and lofty character; but the system itself as a religious machinery was borrowed from its environments. The central idea which pervades the entire sacrificial service is the same that underlies the Semitic, if not primitive religion in general, and that is, that only *blood* as the vital power of man and beast *unites* and *reunites* men and God. Only blood possesses the power of *atonement* (see Lev. xvii. 11). Only blood seals a covenant and reconciles an angry deity. Only the signs of blood protect the houses, the men and the flocks against malign spirits. Read the personal observations made in Bible lands by Prof. Curtiss in his "Primitive Semitic Religion" and by Clay Trumbull as recorded in his "Blood Covenant" and "The Threshold Covenant," and you have the key to many religious ceremonies of ancient Israel. New light is there thrown upon the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of Exodus which treat of the Passover lamb whose blood is sprinkled upon the doorsill and doorposts and of the sacrifice of the firstborn of the flock and the herd together with the signs upon the arm and the forehead. We learn of the shepherds of Arabia and Palestine offering each spring at the increase of their flocks and herds some of the firstborn as a sacrifice called *Fedu*,—the same as *Pidion*, "Redemption,"—into the blood of which they dip the hand to put the sign of "a hand" or of a "Tau" (cross) upon the doorsill and upon the forehead of men and sprinkle some upon the flock and the herd to avert ill-luck or to insure the

divine blessing. So is every new household opened by a moving tribe, or by a newly married couple, consecrated by sacrificial blood warding off evil spirits that may beleaguer it. So is every grievous sin committed ransomed off by such sacrificial rite.

Likewise is the life of a child in cases of sickness or distress dedicated to the local saint, bought off by the sacrifice of a lamb or goat, and in case of poverty also by a rooster or hen. We thus find the closest similarity between the practices mentioned in the Bible and those still in use in the Bible lands. Also in regard to the festivities of the ingathering and the firstlings of the yearly produce. As Maimonides, in the third book of his Moreh, has suggested with fine divinatory powers, it was the method of a wise pedagogy which either made use of pagan rites to train the people of Israel for higher religious views and habits, or so transformed the ancient practices as to guard the people against lapsing into heathen vice and cruelty.

We must bear in mind that antiquity knew of no other form of worship than sacrifice. However bitterly the great prophets in Israel condemned the heathen mode of bribing deity by the blood and the oil poured upon the altar while Israel's God demanded righteous conduct, they could not abrogate the sacrificial cult. Nor did they intend doing so. They did not accord to prayer and song a higher place in the service. Even the great seer of the Exile, when giving utterance to the glorious vision of the time when the house of God would become a house of prayer for all the nations, still beholds the pillars of smoke rising from an altar decked with holocausts and other blood offerings. And so does the incense of sacrifice offered to God from the rising of the sun unto its setting betoken to the last of the Prophets the universality of religion. Only the Hasidean Psalms xi and l echo forth the clear note of dissent, ushering in a new era of religious life during the Exile, as we shall see. In the Mosaic system the priestly ritual, dominant in all sanctuaries, is the only legitimate one. Prayer, and confession of sin are admitted as occasional outpourings of the individual, yet only at the outer parts of the sanctuary. Even the inspiring song and music of Levitical choirs find no place, or mention, alongside of the primitive horn (Shofar) and trumpet.

In all likelihood this simplicity is intentional. It was to form a striking contrast to the seductive orgies of the Canaanite. This would also account for the strange lack of ceremonial prescribed for the different holy days. Only the old shepherd festival of spring, Pesah, transformed into a memorial feast of the Exodus has a more elaborate ritual. The three agricultural festivals still appear in a rather shadowy form except in so far as the number of sacrifices is concerned. Obviously, the lawgiver is concerned only with the regulation of the official cult. As to the popular festivities, we only learn that the poor, the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the Levite were to participate in the joy of the harvest and vintage and to receive the corners of the field at the ingathering of the crops. From other sources, especially from comparative studies of religious practices, we learn that certain portions of the field were consecrated by the people to the gods of fertility amidst religious processions of a half lascivious and half austere character; and we at once comprehend the meaning and the high ethical purpose of the Mosiac law assigning the corners of the fields to the poor. Also in regard to the Sukkoth festival and the palm, myrtle and willow branches specified in connection therewith, there are several indications in Scriptural passages that the festivities of the water libation held in the second temple originated in ancient times; only the priestly legislation had no interest in a public ceremonial outside of the sanctuary.

In the Atonement Day ceremonial we have a peculiar combination of a primitive Semitic and a purely monotheistic rite of expiation. The scapegoat sent out to Azazel, the goat-like demon of the wilderness, as Ibn Ezra sagaciously explained the name, belongs to the same category as the bird sent out to carry the disease of the leper into the wilderness (Lev. xiv. 53) and has many analogies in ancient Semitic usages (see Robertson Smith "Religion of the Semites," p. 402 note, and comp. Orelli "Religionsgeschichte" p. 760; and art. Azazel in J. E.). This archaic rite meant for the inhabitants of Jerusalem originally the removal of physical evil for the new solar year (xi. 1 and comp. Lev. xxv. 9-10). The priesthood, on the other hand, expatiated on the rites of expiation for the sanc-

tuary, the effects of which only indirectly affected the people for whom the day was made a fast day. The whole ritual has an exclusively hierarchical character which was changed only at the hands of the Pharisees in their combat with Sadduceeism. These only gave it the character of a grand symbolic act of purification and divine atonement.

The only day which stands out as a genuine Jewish institution without parallel in paganism is the *Sabbath*. It is emphatically declared to be the sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exod. xxxi. 16-17). Unlike the Babylonian Sabbath which figures as a day of austere stand-still for the royal representative of the nation, the Mosaic Sabbath is a day of rest and recreation for the whole nation, including the slave, the stranger and the beast. It is a testimonial to God as the Creator of the Universe as well as the Liberator of man. Still a ceremonial of a positive kind is prescribed only for the priest who, besides the additional sacrifice, places the new shew-bread upon the golden table each Sabbath day while taking home the old (Lev. xxiv. 8-9).

As the great Memorial day of the deliverance from Egypt, the Passover feast also occupies a central position in the Mosaic number of holy days. Many ceremonies cluster around it to become reminders of important religious and ethical laws, the unleavened bread of primitive time (See Tylor's "Anthropology," p. 267) having been rendered symbolic of the hastened exodus of Israel from the land of bondage.

There remain for discussion, then, those ceremonies particularly enjoined as signs for the body. The most important of these is the sign of the Abrahamitic covenant. Here, too, the pedagogical tendency of the Mosaic law becomes evident as soon as we compare the rite prescribed in Genesis xvii. 11f. with the one in use among all the other tribes in Arabia, Africa and Australia, and find traces of the older primitive form also in ancient Biblical time. I refer to the stone knives used by Zipporah and Joshua which, as shown by Tylor ("Early History," 217) point to a cruder age, and to the connection of the rite with marriage in the story of Shechem (Gen. xxxiv). It is the consecration of manhood at the approach of

puberty and before marriage that is intended by the practice in primitive life, and the painful ordeal becomes a test for the youth, as in similar savage customs. Obviously in assigning the tenderest age of infancy as the time for the performance of the rite, when the pain, or consciousness of pain, is minimized, whereas Ishmael, the father of the Beduin tribe, is circumcised at thirteen years of age, the act is elevated to the dignity of a solemn initiation of the child into the Abrahamitic household. The solemnization of the act by a public festivity, however, as is done by the Moslem who calls it "the feast of purification" (comp. Joshua v. 9 and the art. Circumcision in the J. E.) came into use only in post-Biblical time. Whether the Deuteronomist (Deut. x. 16; xxx. 6; compare Jeremiah iv. 4 and ix. 24), in symbolizing the rite accepts the view of the priestly Code or deprecates it, is a matter open to controversy. There is no doubt, however, that the idea of the Blood-Covenant prevailed also in relation to this rite, as may be learned from its relation to the Passover feast (Exod. xii. 44-48). And this leads us to the "sign" on the hand and between the eyes mentioned in this connection in Exod. xiii. 9 and 16. Rabbinical tradition refers this to the Phylacteries introduced in post-Biblical time. But Samaritan practice to this very day helps to elucidate the passage. The blood of the Passover-lamb slaughtered on Mount Gerizim is put on the arm and the forehead of the children, as has been witnessed by Petermann "Reisen in Orient" I, 137; Stanley "Eastern Church" I, 561 and others. Out of such custom which has talismanic character, the Tefillin or Phylacteries developed, just as the Mezuzzah grew out of the other talismanic practice of bedaubing the doors with blood in the shape of a hand and the like. The Deuteronomic law-giver (vi. 8-9; xi. 18-20) suggests by way of symbolism " the binding of the words of the Law on arm and forehead and the inscription of the same on the doorposts," a practice met with among Moslems today and among Christians of old; and this became a fixed ceremonial law, although the talismanic character of both the Tefillin and Mezuzzah is occasionally alluded to in the Targum and the Talmud (see my article in "Monatschrift," 1893, p. 445 f.). The Zizith, too, which in Deut. xxii. 12, appear to be merely enjoined as a lesson of public decorum, are in the Holiness

Code (Numbers xv. 37-41) prescribed as a ceremonial practice of a religious nature, though the talismanic character of the purple blue thread upon the fringes is generally assumed by modern commentators and seemingly confirmed by Talmudic utterances. (See Tosifta Berakot at the close and Midrash Tehillim to Psalm vi.)

A real consecration of the entire people of Israel as God's holy priest-nation is expressed in the dietary laws, the priestly origin and character of which cannot be doubted by the student of comparative religion. Whether R. Smith's theory of the totemitic significance of the unclean, or tabooed, animals, be accepted or not, the fact that the laws of the Hindoos, of the Persians, the Babylonians and the Egyptians forbade the same classes of animals to the priesthood and that the Mosaic Code itself takes it for granted that the distinction between the clean and the unclean animals dates back to the oldest, the Noahidic, times (Gen. vii. 2), proves that the underlying principle is not a social or hygienic but a specifically religious one as stated (Lev. xi. 44; xx. 25 f.; Exod. xxii. 30; Deut. xiv. 21 comp. Ezek. xiiv. 31 and Judges xiii. 4; and the art. Dietary Laws in J. E.). It is the great legislative attempt to carry into practical effect the prophetical idea expressed at the Sinaitic Revelation: "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." It was, however, on a higher stage, in a more congenial religious atmosphere that this great plan could be brought nearer to its realization, and this was the period of Hasidean or Pharisaic and Rabbinical Judaism.

### 2. The Ceremonies of Pharisaic and Rabbinical Judaism

The difference in the religious life between pre-Exilic and post-Exilic Israel is so marked and so amazingly great that the rabbis could account for it only by the legend that the founders of the Synagogue, "the Men of the great Assembly," had seized the Yezer ha Ra by magic and exterminated him from the earth so as to make an end to the idolatrous propensities of the people (Yoma 69b; Sanh. 64a). The fact is that with the rise of Persia a new spirit entered the world and brought about a great change especially among the Jewish exiles. The higher conception of deity which

lent to life in general a moral purpose, though based on dualism, demanded of the Parsee a purer form of worship. The rising and setting sun, the waning and waxing moon, the various phenomena of nature presenting the combat of light with darkness, and of life with death, were greeted with invocations and prayers rather than with bloody sacrifice. The sensual worship of the lascivious Babylonian deities made way for an adoration of the god of light whose heavenly court appeared as the prototype of the court of the Persian King of Kings. Again it is the principle of assimilation which is at work in the shaping of the Jewish religion. Alongside of the temple with its sacrificial cult attended to by the Sadducean hierarchy, the Synagogue arises as a new centre of religious life created by "the humble" or "pious ones," the saints of the people, impregnated with the prophetic truths and echoing forth their lofty aspirations in the psalms and then in a liturgy shaped after Parsee models. An intense, religious enthusiasm which finds its resonance in the people's heart is awakened by these Hasidim, of the type of Daniel, and expresses itself in ceremonies of a far higher order than is the priestly ritual. The latest writer on the Jewish liturgy, Dr. Ellbogen in the "Monatschrift" is quite at a loss to explain the origin of the recital of the Shema with the preceding benediction praising the Creator for the light of day and Israel's Only One for the light of the Torah. Yet Rappaport and Schorr, as I indicated in my article above referred to, pointed out the way of tracing it to Parsee influence. It was not *imitation,* as our anti-Reformers would say, but *assimilation* that prompted this and many other great improvements upon the old priestly cult. Yes, the Anshe Kneseth ha Gedolah, the founders of the Synagogue, were reformers in adopting the Parsee ceremony of greeting the orb of light at its rise every morning and every evening at its setting; but whereas the worshipers of Ormuzd with their magic formula hailed the sun as deity, the Hasidim invoked God as the Creator of Light and Darkness, expressly accentuating the monotheistic doctrine in contradiction to the dualism of Persia. I cannot here go further into detail. Let me merely call your attention to the fact again overlooked by Dr. Ellbogen, that, in order to give expression in due form to "the acceptance of the yoke of God's Kingship"—Kabbalath Ol Malkut Shamayim, as

is the term for the Shema recital—the ceremony of putting on the Tefillin and of wrapping the head into the Zizith (ornamented shawl or Tallith)—were made regular parts of the morning prayer, for which also the Parsee custom offers an analogy. In fact, most of the morning benedictions are adaptations from the Parsee ceremonial. I will single out the one recited at the crowing of the cock, the sacred messenger of the god of light. The solemn greeting of the new moon is undoubtedly also an adaptation of a Parsee practice to the Jewish faith. Nay more. As has been shown convincingly in the seventh and eighth volumes of Schorr's "He Haluz," the whole Pharisaic principle of investing life with ceremonial observances and corresponding benedictions is taken over from Parseeism.

The leading idea of the epoch ushered in by the Persian dominion was the assertion of the right of the individual in the religious life of the nation. And of this the Synagogue became the powerful exponent, revolutionizing religion by instituting in place of the sacrificial priestly pomp a simple service fervent with true devotion and rich in instruction to appeal to all hearts. God stepped, as it were, out of the darkness of the Holy of Holies, to which only the elect of the priesthood had access once a year, into the full daylight of reason and knowledge to become in reality the God and Father of all. The Torah in the hand of the scribe, the teacher and preacher was to become the property of all; and around the ark containing it and the desk from which it was read and expounded to the congregation, sprang up ceremonies full of meaning and impressiveness. The Torah lent to the Sabbath and holy days a significance they could not have had in ancient Israel; it gave to each season of the circling years a new charm and rhythm. Out of the heart of the religious community blossomed forth the ideas which transformed the three agricultural feasts and the feast of the temple expiation on the tenth of Tishri with its herald, the day of the Shofar blowing, into the great awakeners of religious thought and sentiment, and around each there began to cluster specific ceremonies of soul-stirring beauty and grandeur.

But here, too, we must not lose sight of the historic law of evolution. It is always the few elect who usher in new ideas. Such, in

the epoch we are speaking of, were the Pharisean brotherhoods which, in reclaiming for their assemblies the sanctity of the priesthood guaranteed to Israel in the preamble of the Sinai Constitution, gave a new solemnity to their Sabbath and holy day meals by the Kiddush and Habdalah ceremony, made the Passover night resonant with the joyous strains of the Haggadah, transformed the farmer's feast of the firstlings into a memorial day of Sinai and created the great autumnal season of religious revival for the Jew. The daily meals were also lifted out of the common-place and invested with priestly holiness by these brotherhoods. Seated around a common table they began and finished with benedictions and other ceremonies in imitation of temple practice and that of other religious fraternities. In like manner, social events, such as weddings and funerals, or the initiation of youths into the study and practice of the Torah, the Bar Mizwah celebration, were made specific religious solemnities. (See art. Bar Mizwah; Benedictions, Essenes and Pharisees in the J. E.) Gradually a new factor of religious life enters and opens a new sphere, for ceremonial observance. Woman as builder and guardian of the home is more and more recognized, and the rigor of the Mosaic purity laws as well as the austerity of the Hasidean saint gives way to the dictates of common sense. Henceforth the Jewish home is emblazoned and enriched with new ceremonies which accord to woman a prominent place in religious life. The kindling of the Sabbath lamp and the baking of the Sabbath bread, and the like, invest domestic life with new means of sanctification. In the same measure as the Jew withdraws from the political arena to form an exclusively religious community in the midst of the nations, his life from the cradle to the grave becomes a round of ceremonial observances distinguishing it from his surroundings. Yet as the real purpose and origin of all these rites and ceremonies are forgotten, the impression obtains that separation, distinction of the Jew from the non-Jew, is the sole object, and non-Jewish habits, even of the most innocent kind, are condemned as included in the Mosaic prohibition of Hukkat ha Goy, which refers only to the lewd practices of the idolatrous nations.

But such is the power of assimilation working unconsciously in

Judaism that almost every age and country added customs and ceremonies of pagan origin and superstitious character. Such a one is the rite of Kapparoth, the waiving and slaughtering of a cock, respectively hen, for males and females, on the eve of Yom Kippur, a sort of vicarious sacrifice met with also among Mohammedans and likewise the ransoming of the dangerously sick, "Pidyon ha Nefesh" (see Curtiss, "Eodem" 28, 233).

The rites connected with marriage, birth and death present a strange combination of ancient Oriental and Occidental practices. The wine and the benedictions at the wedding date from the time when the sacrificial meal cemented the matrimonial covenant (see Clay Trumbull, "The Blood Covenant" and Tobit viii. 5), whereas the ring as a symbol is a mediaeval innovation. Few people are aware that the bridal veil, which lent the name to the Roman nuptials, is but a survival of the cutting-off of the bride's hair, a practice still adhered to in Russia among Jews and Gentiles (see Lippert "Cultusgeschichte" II, 125, 155 f. and Ralston "Russian Folk Songs," 27 f.). So has the Rabbinical prohibition to have weddings take place in holy seasons its parallel in Roman custom (see Lippert, p. 99), while the forbidding of weddings during the Omer days corresponds to the Roman and English avoidance of May weddings. (See Landberg in Geiger's "Zeitschr," 1869 p. 81ff.)

The solemnizing of the Berith Milah is neither Biblical nor Talmudical but was apparently adopted from the Mohammendans among whom also the Rabbinical festivity of the Shebua ha Ben, "the seventh day of the child" is found. (Comp. Klunzinger "Bilder aus Ober Aegypten," 1877, p. 181 f.; Lane "Customs of the Egyptians of To-day," III, 138, German Translation, with Baba Bathra 60b and Loew's "Lebensalter.") Especially interesting is the adoption of the feast of Naming the Child, from the Germans under the heathen name of *Holle Kreisch* for the daughter, obviously for the reason that Oriental tradition had made no provision for this family event (see Perles in "Graetz Jubelschrift" p. 24). Especialy large is the number of practices adopted by the Jew from his surroundings in the event of death. Superstition, deisidaemonia, "fear of the demons" as the Greeks call it, is the child of fear. Most funeral rites

were originally means of pacifying the dead who claimed their part from the living. Out of the sacrifices *to* the dead, transformed later into sacrifices *for* the dead, developed all the rites and prayers that at a more advanced stage became sources of comfort for the living. The ancient fear died away and piety stepped into its place to preserve the old customs in a new garb and in a new spirit. There is nothing that so appeals to the Jew with his innate love for the fathers who sleep in the dust as does the *Kaddish* and the *Yahrzeit*. Yet both have their origin in fear, fear of the purgatory and fear lest the unlucky day again brings death. They have obtained a prominent place in Jewish life, though their origin and character are un-Jewish; not Christian, as Zunz says, but Persian and Babylonian.

In thus reviewing the entire system of Jewish observances as they have come down to us through the centuries, we find them to be indispensable forms of expressing the religious feelings prompted by the various events of life. As we advance in culture, enlightenment and refinement, these various ceremonies may appear to us as empty shells void of meaning, but we must never forget that nothing grows on the tree or in the soil without the shielding leaf and husk. Abstract truth and ethical practice fail to satisfy the religious craving of man. He needs ceremonies that impress him with the nearness and the holiness of the divine. And while the Mosaic Code placed the sanctuary and the priesthood into the foreground, often ignoring the life of the people, we see Pharisaic and Rabbinic Judaism creating new ceremonies or transforming the old so as to impress the Jew on all occasions with his priestly sanctity. He rejoices in the multitude of observances which surround his life like so many guardian angels. Unlike his Christian neighbor, who from fear of the Satanic powers of evil surrenders to blind dogma, he sees his path of life lined with ceremonies which secure to him the divine favor.

The question for us today, however, is: Can these ceremonies of traditional Judaism still occupy the same place in our life? True, they have accomplished much for the Jew of the past in offering a wondrous discipline which drilled him to do soldier's duty in defend-

ing the ancestral inheritance and in shunning no sacrifice to uphold it against a world of bitterest enmity and intolerance. Still, they have long ceased to impress us with the idea of priestly holiness and have become "the work of men inculcated by rote." Rabbinical ceremonialism has become as unbearable to us as the sacrificial sacerdotalism was to the prophets of old. It is just as much fetishism for us to wear the Tallith and the Tefillin, though the Talmud consigns the head not adorned by Tefillin to Gehenna (Rosh Hashanah 17a), as to have the Aaronides still chant the Priestly Blessing in the Synagogue. The dietary and purity laws, whether Mosaic or Rabbinical, are dead and buried for us, and no power in the world can resuscitate them. And this is the case with many other ceremonial institutions deemed fundamental by the law-observing Orthodox. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that, as our entire *Weltanschauung* changes, so must our religious views necessarily change. In order to have a positive religious value and significance, ceremonies must either directly or symbolically express thoughts and feelings that appeal to us while elevating, hallowing and enriching our lives. Romanticism which only loves ancient practices because they are picturesque representations of a dead past is not religion, which must above all be the voice of a living truth, of a living God.

### 3. The Ceremonies of Modern Judaism

Before discussing the need and the function of ceremonies in modern Judaism, we must be clear as to what we would call Modern, or as it is commonly termed, Reform Judaism. To most people, some of our Reform Rabbis included, Reform appears as something arbitrary, as a sort of eclecticism which singles out such of the laws and institutions of Judaism for observance as appeal to reason and common sense and suit our convenience, more or less, while disregarding or rejecting the rest. Moreover, they find it to be paradoxical to disclaim the authority of the written and oral Law and at the same time lay claim to loyalty to the Torah as divine revelation. It is unquestionably this very perplexity which has induced many Reformers to seek refuge in Nationalism. The fact is, Reform Judaism is just as much the necessary outcome of our his-

torical age of research as was Rabbinism the result of blind belief in authority. The principle of evolution offers us the key so to reread the past as to enable us to see its continuity in the present, no matter what changes altered conditions have brought about. Looking beneath the surface of the letter and the form, we find the same laws that have been at work both in the Mosaic and in the Rabbinic period of Judaism to be still at work in the modern epoch; only with the essential difference that in the former stages the work was done by unconscious forces of the Jewish genius for which the religious terminology is revelation and inspiration, God working through the chosen organs and authorities, whereas in our age of reason the religious progress is achieved by us in response to the dictates of our own religious consciousness. The recognition of the fact that both Mosaism and Pharisaism have been borrowing and adopting forms of religious practice from their surroundings in the shaping and reshaping of the religious life of the Jewish people, entitles us to pursue the same method of the remodelling of the present Judaism in order to revitalize and quicken its forces. Of course, innovations and reforms at first militate against the justly venerated authority of the past, and it requires a successive period of tacit assent to legitimize them and render them integral parts of the whole system of religion. No doubt, to the prophet Elijah as well as to Hosea xii. 10 the Solomonic Temple with all its sacerdotal pomp appeared as an imitation and assimilation of Phœnician worship, while in the priestly Code this very sacerdotal cult is represented as divinely patterned. Exactly so will much that is now decried as Christianization by our short-sighted retrogressionists, viz.: our Reform temple with its organ and female singers, its family pews and all its Occidental characteristics, receive its full acknowledgment as Jewish by coming generations who will no longer know of the former dissent. Each age creates its own divine authorities, is the maxim voiced in the Rabbinical saying: "Jephtha the Judge in his age is the same as Samuel the prophet in his." Life is bound to assimilate forms as well as ideas and will sanction such assimilations as have strengthened and vitalized the religious idea.

Now there can be no question as to the need of ceremonial practices in our age. Doctrine alone, however lofty, does not stir the

soul and bring it in touch with the great Fountainhead of Holiness and Love. Religious acts do. They awaken and deepen, as Lazarus says in his "Jewish Ethics," the sense of duty in us. They develop our spiritual faculties because they appeal to our emotional nature. They impress us with the holiness of life much more than abstract truth can. They bring all the lessons of religion home to us in striking, persuasive and attractive form. The skeptic who remains cold when he hears arguments, however convincing, is moved to tears when some ceremonial act brings back to him long-forgotten memories roused by associations of thought and sentiment connected therewith. No religion can be without such memorial "signs;" least of all, Judaism with its wondrous history of achievement and of endurance. Ceremonies are the educators and monitors of the people; they speak to old and young, to sage and simple-minded alike the language of faith, of hope and of loyalty. When the Torah scroll in its time-honored garb of splendor is held forth before the assembled congregation, the words: "This is the Law" resound in our ear and heart with the glorious tale of the centuries of Jewish heroism and martyrdom, with the world-wide message of its perennial truth. So should each ceremony be another appeal to lofty aim and noble action. It comes to us as a means of sanctification of life and of consecration to duty. Every event or experience in life, each turning point in nature and history should link mortal man to the throne of the everlasting King and invest the commonest incidents of daily existence with the dignity of divine service. This is the underlying idea of ceremonial law in Judaism, and our strenuous age of worldly ambition and greed can least afford to be without this educating influence.

The question is, however, in how far do our inherited religious practices fulfill this aim and object? There is no dispute among the most radical that the Sabbath and festival days are still most potent ceremonial institutions performing the function of educators for the Jewish community, the home and the individual. They revive the dormant soul of the Jew ever anew, giving rhythm, pathos and charm to the life of all and each. But, then, are the ceremonies connected with each real signs and testimonies symbolic of the truths

they are to convey? Do they speak an intelligible language to the young for whom they are, according to Scripture, chiefly intended? Here is the place where Reform has to step in and render the old ceremonial attractive, suggestive and impressive for the new generation. We all realize today that the ceremonies for the home have not received sufficient attention. The importance of hallowing and enriching the Jewish home life has not been fully appreciated. Dr. Berkowitz has made a good beginning with his Sabbath Eve Kiddush. A corresponding Kiddush ceremony we shall soon have for each of the holy days, something similar to the Passover Haggadah. But there is no need of stereotyped traditional formula. We ought to create fitting expressions of the ideas suggested by the day. It is unnecessary to say that the older generation ought to reintroduce the beautiful parental blessing at each family reunion or Sabbath and holy day eve to render the whole more impressive. It must be placed to the credit of the Reformers that the ceremony of the kindling of the Hanukkah lights has been revived in homes where the Christmas tree threatened to captivate the young hearts and lessen their pride in their ancestral faith. Yet much more ought to be done by us to awaken the sentiment of loyalty and love in the young by the introduction of new appropriate forms where the old ones have lost their impressiveness.

At present we need means of strengthening the self-respect of the Jew, of arousing his Jewish consciousness. Especial emphasis must therefore be laid upon the ties that bind him to his past which alone will fill his soul with pride in his great heritage. In religion especially, where reverence plays so prominent a role, the ancient institutions must be treated with regard and awe, and as long as any religious observance proves helpful it should be retained. We can herein learn from nature never to cast off the old before the new is strong enough to weather the storms. If the wholesome effect made by ceremonies upon the parents is observed by the child, they will not fail to work by the mystery of sympathy upon the latter in the plastic time of youth. Upon the much neglected home of the Jew, then, the ceremonial system should be centred. Religion should stand as sponsor at the naming of the child and should solemnize

each important event in the life of the household, thus rendering the home a true sanctuary, and father and mother its priest and priestess, as of yore. Even the recital of the Shema each morning and evening might be transformed into a solemn domestic service to leave its ennobling and hallowing impression upon each member of the household.

We must bear in mind that we are in a great transition period. The yoke-bearing age is behind us. Formerly the ceremonies were to be observed as divine command; for us today they must have an intrinsic value in order to be of binding force. Religion must first of all voice the innermost craving of the human soul as a child of God. Ceremonies which assign to woman an inferior rank according to Oriental notions are out of place with us. Reform Judaism recognizes woman as man's equal and sees in her deeper emotional nature, which is more responsive to the promptings of the spirit, the real inspiring influence for religious life in the household. Accordingly all the ceremonies in the domestic life today should be Occidental rather than Oriental in form and character.

In this connection let me speak of the Bar Mizwah ceremony to which many Reform Congregations still adhere. By so doing they ignore the plain fact that the calling up of the thirteen year old lad to read from the Torah is a mere survival of the calling up of all the members of the congregation to the Torah reading. The original significance, which was to indicate thereby the admission of the lad into the membership of the congregation, has been forgotten and consequently the usage today is meaningless. The moment the Oriental notion of the superiority of man over woman in religious life was abandoned, a form of consecration for the young of both sexes was instituted in its place and the beautiful rite of confirmation was adopted. As a befitting conclusion of many years of religious instruction it exerts a potent influence upon the young Jews and Jewesses, while it has lent new attractiveness to the Shabuoth festival which otherwise lacked a specific or characteristic ceremony in traditional Judaism. Of course, it ought to be simple, a sincere outpouring of the hearts of the young; we must not allow it to degenerate into an empty display. Another feature in our religious

life of today should be mentioned here. In the same measure as our age refuses to blindly follow the past, realizing the wide difference between our mode of thought and that of our forbears, the need of giving fuller expression to the sentiment of piety has made itself felt. Greater stress than in former days is laid upon the recital of the Kaddish and similar tributes of affectionate regard for the dead. True, such emotional piety can never replace true, religious sentiment. Nevertheless there is a brighter side to it of which account must be taken. The crude belief in resurrection of the past which has been the source of fear and superstitious practices, has made way for the belief in the immortality of the soul. And this has lent new solemnity to that part of the service called Commemoration of the Dead—a liturgy which, while emphasizing in classic form the inherited trait of Jewish reverence and piety has invested the Yom Kippur with new luster for the Jew of today.

But above all the Jewish religion must be presented as a factor of life in humanity's work, in order to win all hearts today. It must accentuate the universal, the human and the practical side of life. It must train man for the service of mankind. By this standard alone is religion judged and estimated. Will Judaism be found inferior to other religions before the forum of humanity? This ethical concept of religion is the Jewish one ever since the great seers of Israel hurled their scathing denunciations against sacerdotalism, demanding individual rectitude and social righteousness. The world is coming ever nearer to the lofty prophetic view. Are our ceremonials vocal of this prophetic truth? I am far from believing that Reform's work is accomplished by a mere remodelling of the Sukkah and Lulab or the Shofar to harmonize them with our advanced aesthetical or artistic taste. Reform must become constructive and positive, aggressive and boldly self-confident, more imbued with the creative spirit of the religious genius of Judaism. It is by no means sufficient to have symbols bringing home to us the glorious memories of the past. We must have such as hold before us the great hopes, promises and ideals of the future together with practical lessons for the present. The feast of redemption must tell us of the redemption of an oppressed world and of the

great universal plan of liberty allotting its burdens and its tasks to each and all. So must the Maccabean feast of lights proclaim the ultimate triumph of truth and justice over falsehood, intolerance and wrongdoing everywhere. So will each festival, the Day of the Giving of the Law with its lesson concerning Ruth and the Proselyte, and Sukkoth with its peace offerings for the seventy nations of the world, lead us out of the narrowness of the national self to the broad outlook of cosmopolitan humanity with its practical aims. And as the great New Year's and Atonement Days preached since wellnigh two-thousand years the religion of manhood and of broad humanity, may they not become also powerful instrumentalities of uniting and reconciling all classes and races of men by practical modes of readjusting the inadequacies of social life suggested by symbols taken from the Yom Kippur Haphthara (Isaiah lviii) and the Jubilee idea connected with the Yom Kippur (Lev. xxv)?

It has been said that in emphasizing our mission to preach pure ethical monotheism we are fast losing our Jewishness which is maintained only through separatistic Jewish observances of the Oriental type. It seems to me that they labor under a great delusion who earnestly believe that the Occidental Jew in general will ever fashion his social life differently from that of the people amongst whom he lives. And if he were to do so he would merely lessen the great opportunities offered him by this age of ours of rendering his religion "a light to the nations" and "a blessing to all families on earth." To me Judaism is an ever-progressive religion, and in a congenial atmosphere of freedom and moral greatness it is bound to expand, and its symbolic rites will be commensurate in suggestiveness and intrinsic value. No fear, then, that the Jew may lose his identity when he aspires to the highest aims of life, buoyed up with the consciousness of his mission for the world. In order to impress the Jew with the greatness of his task and his responsibility as mankind's priest we should have certain ceremonies. It is for this that new symbolic forms may have to be created expressive of the Jew's world-duty as God's chosen one, since the mere prohibition of intermarriage or the Abrahamitic sign of the covenant is not sufficiently indicative of Israel's priest-dignity.

I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet but I see the day dawning when the larger view and the larger life of the new age of which the Jew partakes in so eminent a degree will suggest religious practices and symbolic observances offering practical lessons of universal love, peace and righteousness to the Jew as humanity's teacher and pattern. Where pessimists see nothing but decline and decay, I see a gradual transformation leading to a rejuvenation of Judaism and a broadening out of its scope and its sphere of influence.

The Rabbinical dictum oft quoted in favor of abrogation: "The Ceremonial laws will have lost their validity in the world to come" (Niddah 61b) refers to the world of the spirit in which man has ceased striving and aspiring. As long as man is in a frame of clay, he needs "signs" and "memorials" to remind him of his destiny and duty. Ceremonies are the poetry of religion; they invest life with the beauty of holiness. The need of such has been felt by Judaism all the more because images and signs representing the Deity have at all times been scrupulously shunned. Imperceptibly, however, old ceremonies are transformed and finally replaced by new ones, while some have become distinctive features which must be upheld to keep it from disintegration. As Morris Joseph in his "Judaism as Life and Creed" correctly says: "That a law or an observance tends to keep up Jewish separateness is by itself no valid argument for its retention. To justify its continued existence it must show that it still serves a moral and religious purpose, that its spiritual vitality is unexhausted. Mere separateness is not an ideal to be cherished. Rightly conceived it is but a means to an end, and that end is the effectiveness of the Jew as a religious instrument. If it fail to secure that end it is an unmixed evil."

"Break the barrel but let not one drop of the precious wine flow out!" This is the way the Rabbis characterize a seemingly impossible task. Such is the problem Reform has to solve. Under the influence of time the old forms crumble and fall. We have to see to it that the fragrance, the spirit of the old be not lost as we pass on to the new.